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ABSTRACT

A national survey examined the factors that are primarily responsible in determining an individual's overall quality of life. Using the critical incident technique, researchers surveyed a representative sample of 50- and 70-year-old adults in the United States in order to determine which of 15 factors they felt had negative and positive effects on their quality of life. Considered in the survey were the following factors: spouse, children, friends, work, health, socializing, active recreation, relatives, material well-being, passive recreation, helping, understanding oneself, learning, creativity, and government. The respondents were asked to identify the three areas that had the most positive effects on their lives at age 30, age 50, and at present. Over the life span, "spouse" is the most frequent single dominant positive factor. Men considered work and children the second and third most positive influences on their quality of life, whereas women considered children and then work the second and third most positive factors in their quality of life. Both men and women identified material well-being as the single dominant negative factor determining quality of life. Both sexes mentioned learning, health, and spouse as important negative factors. (MN)

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26 July 1982

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Some Findings on the Extent to Which Social and Educational Programs Affect the Quality of Life

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Governments and other organizations develop and administer social and educational programs for the benefit of the people. Unfortunately many of these programs are developed without adequate study and understanding of the needs and conditions of the groups to be served.

To provide a clear and valid framework for both the design and the evaluation of social and educational programs, procedures have been developed to assess the current needs of various groups of people and to obtain a comprehensive analysis of the effects of specific programs on the various components of the quality of life of these people.

• Using the critical incident technique, 15 components comprising quality of life for adults were identified. These 15 factors provide an efficient and valid basis for assessing the needs of different groups. A brief description of the development of this empirically derived definition of the quality of life is given in the paper being presented tomorrow afternoon. The present paper will provide a brief review of some results from a national survey of the quality of life of a representative sample of 50 and 70-year old adults in the United States and particularly will be aimed at identifying those components in the set of 15 that are primarily responsible for giving people either a good or a poor overall quality of life.

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The first set of results to be presented are shown in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 provides the answers the representative national samples of 50- and 70-year-olds gave to the question, "Of these 15 areas affecting your quality of life, which three tend most to make it good?" These are included as the

last two columns of percentage figures for the males and for the females. The first two columns for both males and females in this table report retrospective estimates given in answer to the question, "Of the 15 areas of quality of life, which three tended most to make your quality of life good at age 30?" The third column for each group reports the results obtained by asking the 70-year-olds to report retrospectively their responses to the same question for age 50.

Table 2 provides the answers to a parallel set of questions to the 50- and 70-year-olds that asked, "Of these 15 areas, which three most prevent you from having a better quality of life?" Parallel questions asked for retrospective reports from the 50- and 70-year-old groups for ages 30 and 50 on the three factors preventing them from having a better quality of life.

Looking first at the males in Table 1, it is clear from both current and retrospective reports by these 50- and 70-year-old men, the most frequently mentioned factor tending to make their quality of life good is in all cases a close relationship with a wife. At age 50 there are 52 percent of the men who list spouse as one of the three factors and at age 70 there are 44 percent. The retrospective reports range from 37 percent at age 30 by the 70-year-olds to 48 percent at age 30 by the 50-year-olds and 49 percent at age 50 by the 70-year-olds. The men in almost all cases list next most frequently having and raising children as one of the three factors tending to make their life good. The one exception is the retrospective

reports of the 70-year-olds on contributors to making their quality of life good at age 30. Only 25 percent of these 70-year-old men report that children were one of three factors making their quality of life good in their early careers.

The third most frequently mentioned factor making these men's life good was work. This was third on three lists. On the retrospective reports of the 70-year-olds for age 30 work was second. Only 16 percent of the current reports of those age 70 included work as one of the three factors making their life good at the present time. Of course most of this group are not working.

Other factors mentioned by about 20 percent of those in most groups include close friends, active recreation, helping and encouraging others, material comforts, and health. The factor that shows the greatest increase in contributing to quality of life at age 70 as compared with earlier ages is passive recreation.

Turning to the reports of the 50- and 70-year-old women on the factors tending to make their quality of life good, it is clear that having and raising children is the most frequently reported both for current quality of life as a 50- or 70-year-old and in the retrospective reports for ages 30 and 50. More than half of the 50-year-old women's current reports as well as well over half of both retrospective reports for age 30 indicate children as a major factor tending to make their lives good. In second place on all the 50- and 70-year-old women's lists except for the current quality of life of the 70-year-olds is a close relationship with a husband.

Of course most of these 70-year-olds do not have a husband.

Close friends are third most frequently mentioned on all of the retrospective lists and are second for current 70-year-olds and fourth for current 50-year-olds. Helping and encouraging others is the third most frequently mentioned factor for the 70-year-old women and is relatively frequently mentioned on other lists. Other factors frequently mentioned by these 50- and 70-year-old women include health, relationships with relatives, work, except at age 70, and passive recreation, especially at age 70.

Turning to Table 2 there is again a good deal of consistency in the reports of what made their quality of life poor at various ages. Looking first at the 50- and 70-year-old men it is clear that they quite uniformly report material comforts as the factor most frequently tending to prevent them from having a better quality of life. However, this was reported by only 29 percent of the 50-year-old men and 26 percent of the 70-year-old men as one of the three factors preventing them from having a better current quality of life. Their retrospective reports for age 30 somewhat more frequently mentioned material comforts, 38 percent at age 50 and 43 percent at age 70. Learning was generally the next most frequently mentioned factor preventing them from having a better quality of life. Learning was reported by 27 percent of the 50-year-olds and 24 percent of the 70-year-olds as one of the three interfering factors. About 30 percent also mentioned it as an interfering factor reported retrospectively for ages 30 and 50. One of the

factors most frequently mentioned as preventing a better quality of life at age 70 was health. This was also the third most frequently mentioned factor at age 50. However, very few of either group reported health as a negative factor retrospectively for ages 30 and 50. The only other factor mentioned by as many as 20 percent of either group as preventing them from having a better quality of life was active recreation. This was reported by 20 percent of the 70-year-olds and 16 percent of the 50-year-olds as interfering with their present quality of life. Again much smaller numbers reported it as an interfering factor at earlier ages.

As in the case of the men the 50- and 70-year-old women most frequently reported that lack of material comforts was preventing them from having a better quality of life. In all cases the percentages were higher than those reporting this factor for the men. About a third of both the 50- and 70-year-old women mentioned material comforts as an interfering factor with respect to their present quality of life and the retrospective figures for age 30 were substantially larger. As in the case of the men health and learning were the next two most frequently mentioned negative factors. Health was reported somewhat more frequently as interfering with their quality of life by the 70-year-olds and learning more frequently by the 50-year-old women. Again as in the case of the 70-year-old men, 21 percent of the 70-year-old women reported that lack of participation in active recreation was one of the three factors preventing them from having a better current quality of life.

To supplement the analyses of the verbal reports of these 70-year-olds regarding the factors that influenced their quality of life, each life-history was studied to identify the single dominant positive and negative factors that determined their quality of life over the life span. These results are shown in Figure 1.

It is clear that over the life span spouse is the most frequent single dominant positive factor by a large margin including 55 percent of the 70-year-old men and 43 percent of the 70-year-old women. For the women children is a substantial second with 28 percent. For the men work is the second factor with 12 percent. These two factors are third most frequent when they are not second for the two groups. Other factors identified as the single dominant positive factor for a significant but smaller number of men and women were material-well-being, friends, health, socializing, relatives, and active recreation.

The most frequently identified single dominant negative factor over the life span was material-well-being for both men and women. About one-fourth of each group were judged to show it as the single dominant negative factor. The next three most frequently identified single dominant negative factors for the men are learning, health, and spouse in that order. These three factors are also just about the next most frequently identified for the women but in reverse order with spouse (usually health of), health, and learning the single dominant negative factors. Children is just slightly more frequently reported as the single dominant negative factor for women than learning.

The last set of data to be examined are shown in Figure 2. These are the judgments based on the case studies of each of these 1,000 life-histories of 70-year-olds as to which of the 15 factors were critical contributors in determining quality of life over the life span. The three most frequently identified critical positive contributors were the same for both men and women. However, the order for men was spouse, children, and friends and for women children, friends, and spouse. Work was a critical positive contributor for more than half the men over the life span but only about a third of the women. For more than 40 percent of the men, health and socializing were noted as critical contributors over the life span. In studying the women it was judged that for more than 40 percent relatives and socializing were critical positive contributors. The next most frequently noted critical positive contributors to quality of life over the life span for the men were active recreation and relatives with about a third of the men included. Other critical positive contributors in addition to work that were noted for about a third of the women were health and passive recreation. It is of interest to note that over the life span material-well-being was judged to be a critical positive contributor for only 26 percent of the men and 20 percent of the women.

The largest negative critical contributor to the quality of life over the life span of these 70-year-old men and women by a large margin was material-well-being. This was observed as a critical negative contributor for 29 percent of the men and 34 percent of the women. The next three

most frequent factors were the same for men and women but again the order for women was the reverse of that for men. For men the order was learning, health, and spouse while for women it was spouse, health, and learning. Children, work, and relatives were the other significant negative critical contributors to the quality of life of these 70-year-olds over their life span for both men and women.

In reviewing and summarizing these findings a few things stand out. First is the consistency with which a factor is found to be an important or an unimportant factor in determining the quality of life over the life span for both men and women. Second is the large positive roles of spouse, children, and friends in determining the quality of life of both the men and the women. Similarly the substantial negative roles of material-well-being, learning (usually lack of adequate education), and health (especially in the later years) are clearly and consistently shown. Work was clearly a major positive factor for the men and is almost certain to be a much larger factor for future generations of women. Third, the significant positive roles of socializing, active recreation, and passive recreation clearly demonstrate the opportunities these areas provide for social programs that promote the positive contributions from these activities.

In summary the quality of life that these people have enjoyed in their first 70 years is encouraging. There are many opportunities for social and educational programs to improve it for the next generations.

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Table 1

Percentages Mentioning an Area as One of the Three Areas Tending to Make Their Quality of Life Good at 30 and at 50 (for 50-year-olds) or at 30, 50, and at 70 (for 70 year-olds) for 500 Males and 500 Females at Each Age Level

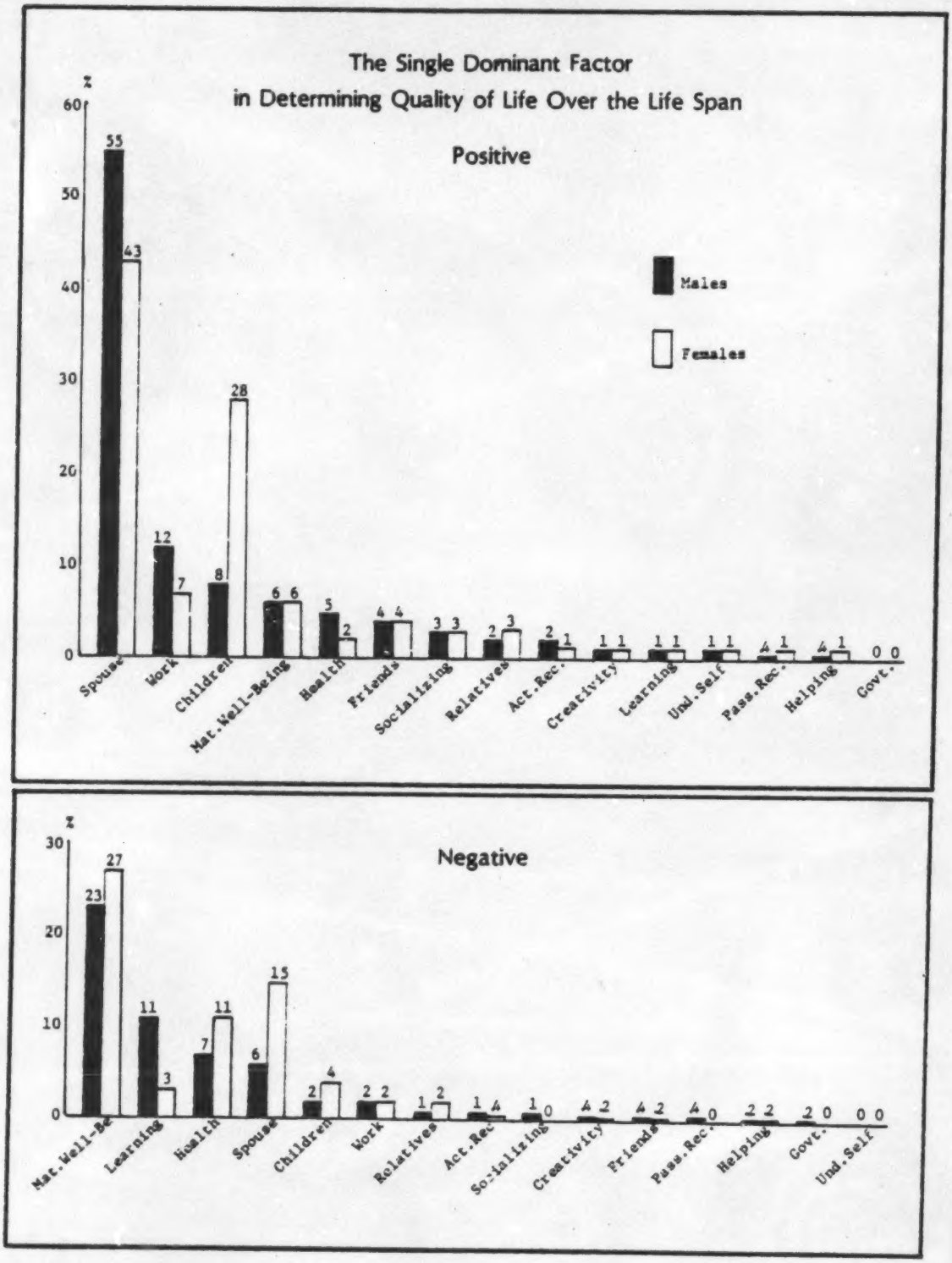
15 Areas of Quality of Life	Males Retrospective			Males Current		Females Retrospective			Females Current	
	For 30 yrs at 70 yrs	For 30 yrs at 50 yrs	For 50 yrs at 70 yrs	For 50 yrs	For 70 yrs	For 30 yrs at 70 yrs	For 30 yrs at 50 yrs	For 50 yrs at 70 yrs	For 50 yrs	For 70 yrs
Material Comforts	13	15	22	22	27	11	8	21	15	19
Health and Personal Safety	21	16	22	22	22	18	17	19	20	27
Relationships with Relatives	14	12	10	9	12	23	18	22	13	23
Having and Raising Children	25	37	34	37	29	54	64	41	51	38
Close Relationship with Husband/Wife	37	48	49	52	44	40	47	36	48	23
Close Friends	27	22	20	21	22	30	27	30	23	35
Helping and Encouraging Others	17	15	18	23	25	18	17	25	23	34
Participation in Government and Public Affairs	6	3	4	3	5	1	3	2	1	2
Learning	10	11	6	12	8	8	10	7	13	8
Understanding Yourself	10	9	11	19	16	11	10	13	25	16
Work	34	32	32	26	16	22	16	22	17	11
Expressing Yourself	6	8	8	11	9	9	8	8	16	14
Socializing	17	16	11	7	9	16	14	13	6	11
Passive Recreation	7	8	10	12	22	10	13	13	14	25
Active Recreation	31	31	18	21	22	14	16	9	11	9

Table 2

Percentages Mentioning an Area as One of the Three Areas Tending to Make Their Quality of Life Poor at 30 and at 50 (for 50-year-olds) or at 30, 50, and at 70 (for 70-year-olds) for 500 Males and 500 Females at Each Age Level

	Males Retrospective			Males Current		Females Retrospective			Females Current	
15 Areas of Quality of Life	For 30 yrs at 70 yrs	For 30 yrs at 50 yrs	For 50 yrs at 70 yrs	For 50 yrs	For 70 yrs	For 30 yrs at 70 yrs	For 30 yrs at 50 yrs	For 50 yrs at 70 yrs	For 50 yrs	For 70 yrs
Material Comforts	43	38	25	29	26	49	41	31	32	33
Health and Personal Safety	5	8	13	21	26	9	9	20	23	31
Relationships with Relatives	8	9	11	7	9	7	13	10	14	8
Having and Raising Children	9	9	9	7	10	10	9	8	7	7
Close Relationship with Husband/Wife	8	9	6	8	7	11	13	17	15	16
Close Friends	3	4	3	5	5	2	4	4	3	5
Helping and Encouraging Others	4	6	5	4	5	3	4	3	4	3
Participation in Government and Public Affairs	16	14	15	17	17	14	16	13	20	17
Learning	31	31	27	27	24	24	24	21	24	21
Understanding Yourself	12	17	8	9	5	11	15	8	8	8
Work	15	15	11	13	13	12	17	11	17	12
Expressing Yourself	12	17	13	17	14	14	13	11	14	10
Socializing	9	11	12	15	13	10	10	10	13	10
Passive Recreation	8	8	8	7	7	5	7	3	8	3
Active Recreation	8	7	12	16	20	13	14	14	15	21

FIGURE 1


The Single Dominant Factor
in Determining Quality of Life Over the Life Span
Positive
%
60
50
40
30
20
10
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Males
Females
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12
7
8
28
6 6
5
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4 4
3 3
2 3
2 1
1 1
1 1
1 1
4 1
4 1
0 0
Spouse
Work
Children
Mat.Well-Being
Health
Friends
Socialising
Relatives
Act.Rec.
Creativity
Learning
Und.Self
Pass.Rec.
Helping
Govt.
Negative
%
30
20
10
0
23
27
11
3
7
11
6
15
2
4
2 2
1 2
1 4
1 0
4 2
4 2
4 0
2 2
2 0
0 0
Mat.Well-Be
Learning
Health
Spouse
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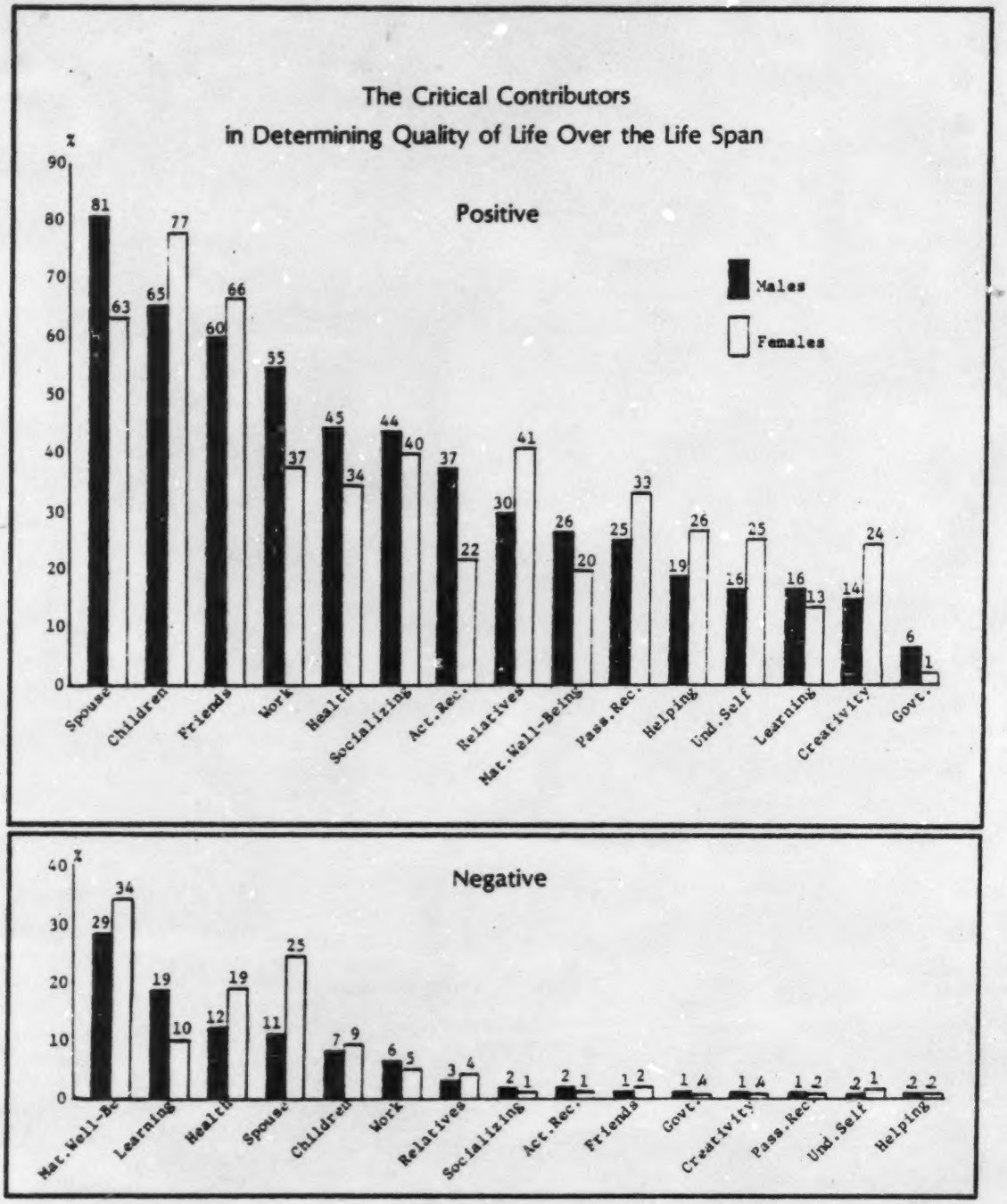
Work
Relatives
Act.Rec
Socialising
Creativity
Friends
Pass.Rec.
Helping
Govt.
Und.Self

FIGURE 2


The Critical Contributors
in Determining Quality of Life Over the Life Span
Positive
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Females
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80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
81
63
65
77
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45
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6
1
Spouse
Children
Friends
Work
Health
Socializing
Acc.Rec.
Relatives
Mat.Well-Being
Pass.Rec.
Helping
Und.Self
Learning
Creativity
Govt.
Negative
%
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Mat.Well-Be
Learning
Health
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Relatives
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Creativity
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Helping